

17 Nov. 1961

Pei

14 November 1961

Memo to: W. O. Roberts

From: Ed Wolff

Subject: Visit to I. M. Pei and Associates in New York City,
November 13 and 14.

I made two visits to Pei's office while in New York. I had an hour's session on Monday afternoon with Pei, Cobb, Weinstein and Mixon, and an hour and a half with Mixon and Weinstein on Tuesday morning.

At the afternoon session Monday, I discussed with Pei and his group the procedures we might follow when they come for their visit next month.

Pei said the "concept" would consist of the following things: a model of the site with the general shapes of buildings situated on the model; a series of diagrams showing the circulation patterns; some other drawings which would give an over-all "feel" to the general approach. He said their presentation would show the relations of one function to another, the relation of the buildings to the out-of-doors, the orientation of the buildings on the site, and the scale of spacing and circulation. He said they would be ready to present no discussion of materials to be used or of such details as windows, specific sizes of offices, etc. He added, however, that we would probably be able to read a good many of these things between the lines but that he thought it better not to distract from the main decisions to be made at this time with discussions of details.

He suggested the following procedure. The afternoon he and his associates arrive, he would like to produce the model and a number of drawings which he would put up on a wall and then give an hour or an hour and a half discussion of the concept which he had produced. This would involve also the discussion of alternate concepts which had been discarded and the reasons for discarding them. He expects to have one concept to present but possibly with some variations on it.

After the presentation, he would like to have questions but not criticisms for the remainder of the afternoon session. That is we would ask informational questions to clarify or add detail to his presentation and they would answer the questions factually without necessarily giving all the reasoning behind their decisions.

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The next morning, after everyone had had a chance to sleep on the presentation and to think through his feelings about the presentation, we would have another general session, led by WOR, at which we would discuss the merits and demerits of the plan as NCAR staff members saw them. At this session, he said, he would like the discussion to be as searching and profound as possible about the general concept of the laboratory, so that if, at this session, we come to terms on a concept, we will not at some later date feel we had not discussed the matter sufficiently. This does not mean, of course, that we are not free to reject the concept in toto if that is our inclination.

Before leaving Pei's office, I felt him out a little bit on the subject of cost. He had said during the discussion that we would not be able to tell at this stage what the cost of building a laboratory according to his concept would be, and that, in fact, the laboratory could be built according to this concept at a great range of square foot costs, depending on materials to be used, luxuries and/or amenities to be provided, etc.

This prompted me to ask the question whether we might, by agreeing to a concept without a price tag, be painting ourselves into a corner, and cause a lot of work which, if it turned out to be a very expensive building, would then be wasted and have to be done over. I asked Pei if he would have preferred, on his last visit to Boulder, to have had WOR tell him that the building must not cost more than a specific amount. Pei said that he would probably have not accepted such a figure as final. He said he was glad not to have been given a figure, that he felt that the main concern of NCAR was to come up with the proper kind of concept, and then to decide, on a basis of certain materials, etc., to be used, how much it would cost. At that time, if certain compromises had to be made, they could then be made. We then discussed the exchange of views which Fry, Thompson, and Roberts had had at the group meeting during Pei's last visit about economy in the laboratory. Pei said he felt that it had been agreed that the laboratory was going to be appropriate to a national center, that it was not to be extravagant, but that we had also ruled out "a rock-bottom approach." "If you had wanted a rock-bottom approach, you would have settled for another HAO building," he said.

I had a feeling during this discussion that he was softening me up a little, in case the cost estimate came out higher than we had expected; and I think he thought I was softening him up for comments of high cost from us if this happens. At the end of the conversation, we both said that we "understood each other completely," by which I gathered he meant that we both understood that we had been playing somewhat of a game and that what was implied was as important as what was said.

Weinstein and Mixon asked me to come by on Tuesday morning and spend a couple of hours with them discussing certain questions they had about the program. At the outset on Tuesday, I told them that I would try to answer the questions they had, but they should consider them tentative answers, that I would check the answers I had given with WOR and/or PDT when I returned to Boulder, and that if there was anything terribly off base, I would let them know immediately. Here are the questions and the answers:

1. They have set up three kinds of offices, the "ivory tower" office completely detached from laboratories, the office which is an integral part of a laboratory (created by glass walls or movable partitions), and an inbetween kind of office (perhaps across the hall from the laboratory). They wish to know the ratio of these three kinds of offices. I suggested that it ought to be 50-20-30.

2. They asked me to assume that the laboratories, both wet and dry, were three main groups, and asked me how important it was that people from one group of laboratories be able to circulate easily to other groups of laboratories. My reply was that though circulation within each of these groups of laboratories was important, that it was not important for every laboratory to be within easy circulating distance of every other laboratory in the whole setup, that therefore it was more important for the laboratory groups to be near to the computer, library, eating facilities, etc. than to other groups of laboratories.

3. They asked whether it would be a good idea to be able to have more laboratory space--that is an additional amount of square footage outside what is now planned--for the final increment, in case we found our laboratory work, either in the experimental program or in the national facilities program, to be larger than now anticipated. I said this would probably be a very good idea, although if these programs grew to be larger than our present plans by say, a factor of three, that both we and they agree that it might be necessary to begin to build some facilities off the mesa top.

4. If it was really necessary, as Dick Meier had suggested, that the library and computer be close to each other. They felt that there was a very great difference in the kind of atmosphere needed for each facility. I said that the only real function that could be shared between a library and the computer was the use of certain kinds of printed materials, but that I did not know the extent of these printed materials or how expensive or advisable it would be to have duplicate sets. They also asked if it would not be better to have a place where one could drink coffee and talk to his fellow scientists so that those who had to wait for their turn to come at the computer would be able to pass the time in this way rather than going to the library.

5. They asked if scientists spent long hours in the computer area. My answer was that a scientist, when he had a problem running on the computer, would probably make several trips a day to the computer, but would not spend a long time there in many of these visits.

6. They asked if the computer area should be expandable beyond the 15,000 square feet indicated for the final laboratory. I said that the space for the computer itself would probably not have to be expanded, but that the office space surrounding it might need expansion, and therefore it might be well to have offices which could be used either for people attached to the computer or for independent scientists.

7. They asked whether the "social center"--Weinstein thinks this is a bad phrase but could think of no better name for it--should be more than just a room or so attached to the eating facilities. He asked whether this room should not be a room which was available and pleasant to use at all times during the day. I told him the room should certainly be available at all times, and should serve two main purposes: First, as a place where small groups could sit in quiet surroundings and talk; second, a place where individuals could sit and think and read. Weinstein asked further if the room should not be a room which suggested that people at the Center were interested in things other than science--if there should not be a good variety of periodicals of a general intellectual nature, and perhaps a couple of small rooms for listening to recorded music. I said that the use of the room as a general intellectual center for the expression of other interests outside of science had not been discussed by us, and that we could discuss this when they came out. He said this decision was not necessary when discussing the concept, and further, that this idea was his own and did not necessarily represent the thinking of his colleagues.

8. He asked if there would be any large radar towers or any other such large towers on the mesa. I answered that there probably would not be, although there might be certain smaller kinds of outdoor hardware.

9. It was asked whether the eating facilities should not be somewhat removed from the laboratory. I replied that if this were done, then coffee facilities would have to be otherwise arranged, and that there were some people who would object to going out-of-doors to the eating facility, while others would find this not only acceptable but preferable. The present thinking apparently is to have the dining facility connected to the main laboratory with some sort of outdoor covered walk-way but this is really just a guess. They further asked about the relation of the conference facility to the lab and the eating facilities, and ~~our~~ explained our concept about this.

In a subsequent telephone conversation with Weinstein (on Wednesday, November 15), he asked the following question: How important is it to have the theoreticians and experimentalists interspersed, rather than having all the theoreticians in one sector of the lab and

the experimentalists elsewhere? Was the intermingling of offices for the two groups more important than having all the offices of the theoreticians close to the computer, or to the library? My reply was that the intermingling of experimentalists and theoreticians--if done in a manner that still allowed the theoreticians quiet and a degree of isolation--was more important than having all the offices of the theoreticians close to the computer and/or library.

END OF MEMO

cc: Philip D. Thompson
Mary L. Andrews
Tician Papachristou
Daniel F. Rex
Joseph H. Rush
Waldo Brockway

ELW:mhl